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BUI TUAN

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CHINA AND THE OVERSEAS CHINESE

ANNCR:

VOA'S BUI TUAN LOOKS AT CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH THE OVERSEAS CHINESE COMMUNITIES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA IN THE WAKE OF THE EXODUS OF SEVERAL THOUSAND CHINESE BUSINESSMEN FROM VIETNAM TO CHINA.

VOICE:

THE FLIGHT OF THE ETHNIC CHINESE MERCHANTS -- WHO ONCE DOMINATED MUCH OF THE COMMERCIAL LIFE IN SAIGON -- HAS BROUGHT OFFICIAL EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN FROM CHINA. LIAO CHENG-CHIH -- HEAD OF THE NEWLY-ESTABLISHED OVERSEAS CHINESE AFFAIRS OFFICE -- SAID LAST WEEK THAT THE PEKING GOVERNMENT WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE FLIGHT OF THE CHINESE RESIDENTS IN VIETNAM AND WAS CLOSELY FOLLOWING THE DEVELOPMENT. CHINA, HE ADDED, HAS A DUTY TO "PROTECT AND INTERESTS OF OVERSEAS CHINESE AND HELP THOSE WHO RETURN."

THERE ARE ABOUT SEVENTEEN MILLION OVERSEAS CHINESE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, INCLUDING TWO MILLION IN INDOCHINA ALONE. THAI PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK CHAMANAND SAID AFTER HIS RECENT VISIT TO PEKING THAT CHINESE VICE PREMIER TENG HSIAO-PING HAS ASSURED HIM THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE TO ABIDE BY ESTABLISHED PRINCIPLES TOWARD THE OVERSEAS CHINESE. PEKING, HE SAID, BELIEVES THAT THE OVERSEAS CHINESE SHOULD ADOPT THE NATIONALITY OF THE COUNTRY OF THEIR RESIDENCE. IF THEY ARE NOT WILLING OR ARE UNABLE TO DO SO, HE SAID, THEY SHOULD NEVERTHELESS STRICTLY ADHERE TO LOCAL LAWS AND CUSTOMS. MR. TENG ALSO SAID THAT THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT AND WILL NOT RECOGNIZE DUAL NATIONALITY.

THE TENDENCY OF THE OVERSEAS CHINESE TO MAINTAIN A SEPARATE IDENTITY IN THEIR ADOPTED COUNTRY, COUPLED WITH THEIR SUCCESS IN COMMERCE IS A SOURCE OF RESENTMENT AMONG THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION AND HAS BEEN A PROBLEM FOR GOVERNMENTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. THIS PROBLEM IS COMPOUNDED BY ATTEMPTS OF CERTAIN GOVERNMENTS TO IMPOSE TIGHT POLITICAL CONTROLS UPON OVERSEAS CHINESE COMMUNITIES.

THAILAND HAS HAD NO SERIOUS PROBLEMS WITH THE OVERSEAS CHINESE, LARGEY BECAUSE MOST CHINESE LIVING IN THAT COUNTRY HAVE BEEN ASSIMILATED INTO THE THAI SOCIETY. IN SINGAPORE, THE CHINESE MAKE UP OVER SEVENTY PERCENT OF THE POPULATION.

BUT ASSIMILATION HAS BEEN MUCH SLOWER IN OTHER SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES. IN SOUTH VIETNAM, THE GOVERNMENT IN THE LATE 1950'S, ATTEMPTED TO FORCE OVERSEAS CHINESE TO APPLY FOR VIETNAMESE CITIZENSHIP. THOUSANDS PROMPTLY DID SO. BUT THE CAMPAIGN WAS SHORT LIVED.

IN THE PHILIPPINES, PRESIDENT MARCOS IN APRIL 1975 -- JUST BEFORE HE FLEW TO PEKING TO ARRANGE FOR THE NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PHILIPPINES AND CHINA -- ORDERED THE ASSIMILATION OF A LARGE NUMBER OF OVERSEAS CHINESE INTO THE FILIPINO COMMUNITY. BUT, OF THE 500,000 CHINESE IN THE PHILIPPINES AT THAT TIME, ONLY ABOUT 20,000 RESPONDED. THE REQUIREMENTS FOR ASSIMILATION WERE LATER RELAXED TO ATTRACT MORE APPLICANTS, BUT APPARENTLY WITH LITTLE SUCCESS.

ASSIMILATION HAS ALSO BEEN SLOW IN INDONESIA -- WITH THREE MILLION OVERSEAS CHINESE -- AND IN MALAYSIA, WHERE ETHNIC CHINESE MAKE UP A THIRD OF THE POPULATION. INDONESIAN VICE PRESIDENT ADAM MALIK RECENTLY SAID IN JAKARTA THAT THE SPEED

WITH WHICH NORMALIZATION OF INDONESIA'S RELATIONS WITH CHINA
CAN BE CARRIED OUT DEPENDS PARTLY ON THE ABILITY OF THE
CHINESE IN INDONESIA TO ASSIMILATE THEIR WAY OF THINKING AND
BEHAVIOR WITH THAT OF THE INDIGENOUS INDONESIANS.

JS/RCS